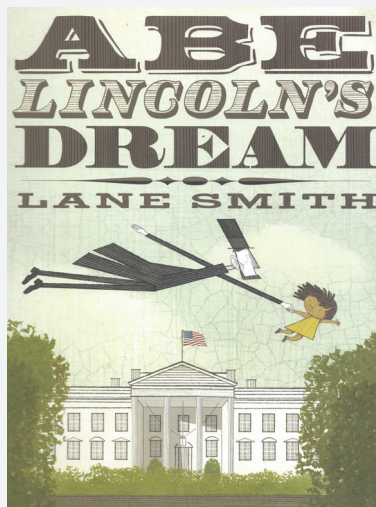


Second Reaction: An Engaging Journey with Lincoln

Smith, Lane. *Abe Lincoln's Dream*. New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2012. Print.

George Hyden



"Don't turn the page! I am not done looking at the picture," was the first response from my students while reading *Abe Lincoln's Dream*, written and illustrated by Lane Smith. The engaging pictures illustrate a story where a young girl and Abraham Lincoln's ghost review his presidential legacy. Throughout the reading, students also asked many questions: "Was that true about the dogs? Who are the presidents on Mount Rushmore? Why did Abraham Lincoln mention bears in the cabin in his joke?" The class had a lively discussion during and immediately following the reading of this book. As a teacher—with a class that loves the Rick Riordan series, the Jeff Kinney series, and Margaret P. Haddix series—it was heartening to see that the students still love a good picture book.

"Hey, this is a lot like that story about Mr. Scrooge," blurted one of my students.

"How so?"

"Well, you know, in that movie the ghosts fly him around showing him what things that he did and will do. It's like when Abraham Lincoln flies around with the girl seeing the stuff in the country and finding out how things worked out," she continued.

Having not anticipated this comparison, I was pleasantly surprised, and it sparked a thought about a future reading of this book: to include a collection of books where the characters transcend time. The help of the district librarian and the countywide public library will be needed to pull a collection together. One of the questions we can investigate is: How does knowing or not knowing the impact of the characters' actions change or not change the character throughout the read-

ing? That thought was sparked when the students pointed out, after the reading, that Abraham Lincoln was happy as he was sailing toward the rising sun on the red, white, and blue riverboat.

Lane Smith's illustrations in this book are rich and thought provoking. Many students were enthralled with the Mount Rushmore illustration toward the end of the story. One student noted that the face of Abraham Lincoln was in the same position as on the real Mount Rushmore monument, even though he was flying through the air with the girl. A quick Google search confirmed this for the student and the class.

One illustration in particular caught my attention. Toward the end of the story there is a two-page spread where Lincoln and the girl are peering through the cherry blossoms at the Capitol Building. The text states:

"And Man?" he asked. "Does he no longer fuss 'n' fight with his fellow man?"(unpaged).

"We're still working on that one." (The girl responded.)

The students caught onto the worried faces of the characters and the chair being tossed out of the window of the Capitol, but they missed a small detail, probably due their proximity to the book. Just below the dome of the Capitol, the illustrator drew windows in the shape of a handgun. Students who read this book at their desk, independently, will not miss this detail. In a nation of gun owners, and a saturation of gun violence in television programs, movies, and video games, students will recognize the shape. In fact, over the years I have taught many students who hunt, shoot with their families, and even shoot in sporting competitions; they will surely recognize the shape. It begs the question: Did the illustrator do this as part of the message pertaining to "We're still working on that one" (unpaged), or was he just playing with shadows? After looking at many Google images of the Capitol's dome (the windows are not in the shape of a handgun), I am under the impression that the gun-shaped windows are a part of the fussing and fighting our nation is still working out. Perhaps the illustrator is referencing the violent crime that fills up our local and national news programming on a daily basis.

Teachers should anticipate the small, illustrative details with any reading of this book, and reference their school and board rules pertaining to the discussion of guns in the school setting. A few options include: (1) students scanning the headlines in both national and local news websites for evidence of "mankind fussing and fighting," or (2) discussing the second amendment of the Constitution and how it protects the right to bear arms. Option two fits well within the scope of our social studies, which focuses on U.S. history and involves analyzing our founding documents.

Abe Lincoln's Dream was well worth reading with the students. It sparked lively discussion and provoked many thoughts and questions. This book definitely received a positive reception from my students.

About the Author

George Hyden teaches fifth grade in central Indiana. He has degrees in education from Purdue University and Butler University. Hyden's interests include being outdoors, fishing, and reading history.